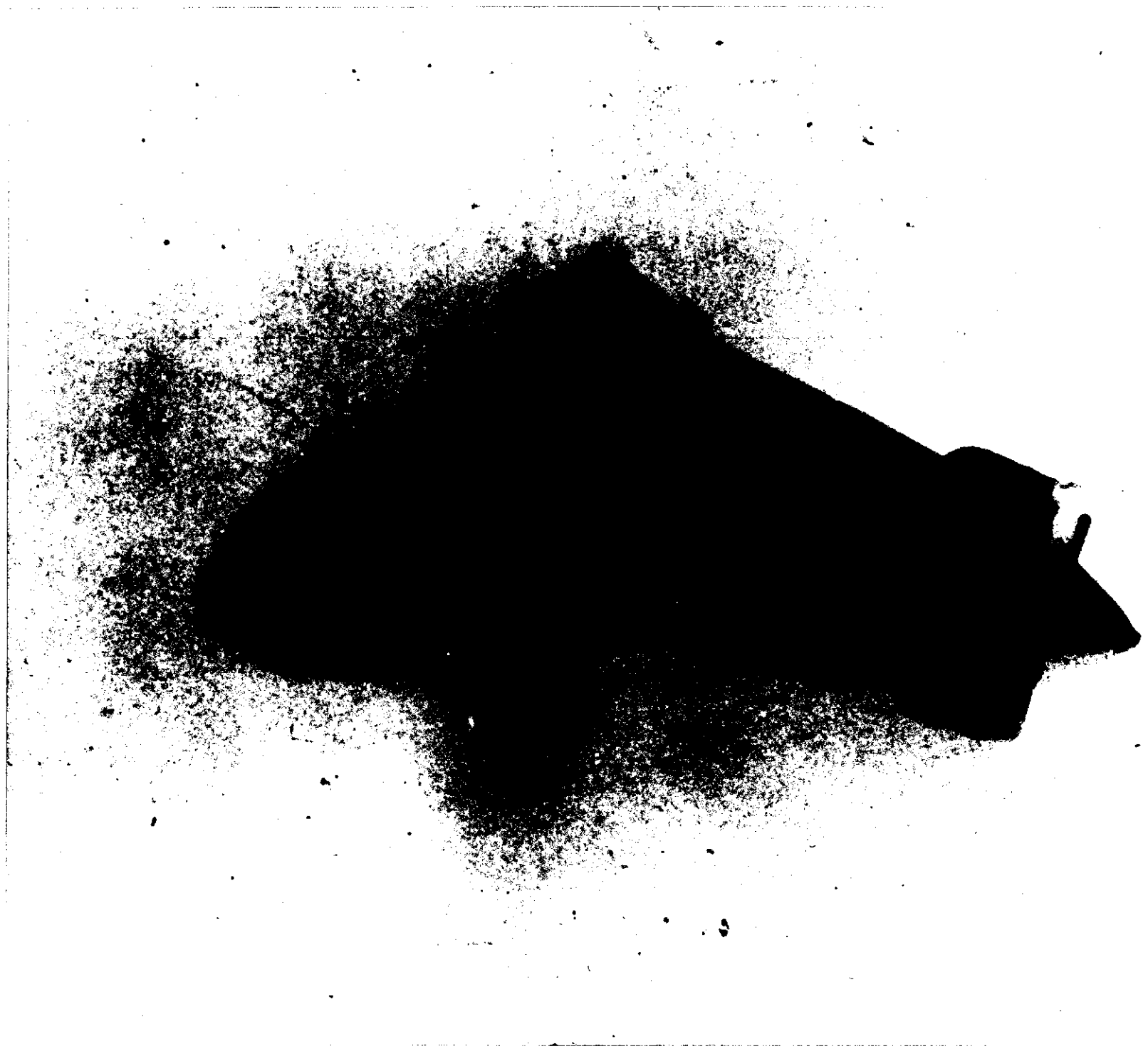


16 August 1942. The partially deflated L-8  
airship prior to its drifting to earth in  
Daly City, California without its two man  
crew.

PLANT AIR PHOTO LAB  
MORRIS FIELD, CALIF.  
222 16 AUG. 1942

1942 used seven days' process and one day  
to develop and to print the 16x22 inch  
photo. The 16x22 inch photo was  
sent to the Navy for its own use.

PLANT AIR PHOTO LAB  
MORRIS FIELD, CALIF.  
222 16 AUG. 1942



16 August 1942. The deflated gas bag of the Navy Airship L-8. The L-8 drifted down in Daly City, California with no one aboard following its departure early in the morning of 16 August on a routine ASW patrol.

# DEFLATED GAS BAG

GENERAL AVIATION PHOTO

The deflated gas bag of the Navy airship L-8 in a Daly City, Calif. street on August 16, 1942. The partially deflated blimp drifted down to earth with no one aboard. Firemen slashed open the gas bag to see if anyone was inside. The air ship had left earlier that morning on a routine anti-submarine patrol near the entrance to San Francisco Bay with two men aboard, they were never seen again.



16 August 1942. The control car of the L-8 airship following its landing in Daly City, California on 16 August without its two man crew.



# NAVY NEWS

HISTORY

NAVAL AIR STATION  
MOFFETT FIELD, CALIFORNIA 94035  
For Further Information Call - 415-966-5976

RELEASE NO: 14

068-70

14 OCT 1970

FOR RELEASE AT EDITOR'S DISCRETION

## FLIGHT TO NOWHERE

### The Strange Odyssey of the L-8

1

John Scotto had left his house and was walking along the narrow suburban street in Daly City, California. It was a quiet Sunday morning, the sun just beginning to warm the August air an hour before noon. Glancing up, he stopped and stared. A partially deflated blimp was drifting towards him, obviously descending.

The blimp settled gently toward the street, scraped across some power lines, and fell to the pavement. A crowd quickly gathered, and some of the men held the blimp down until the police and fire department had been called.

When the fire department arrived it was discovered there was no one aboard the blimp. Firemen slashed open the gas bag to see if anyone was inside.

Inside the car an officer's cap was laying on a shelf, a half-eaten sandwich lay on the floor and a still-warm cup of coffee had spilled across some papers. Everything seemed just as it should be, except there were no men.

The police called Moffett Field.

(MORE)

11

At 6 a.m., Sunday, August 16, 1942, the U.S. Navy blimp L-3, took off on a routine patrol from the Naval Station Treasure Island. L-3, attached to a Moffett Field squadron, was on detached duty to Treasure Island.

Aboard the blimp were two experienced lighter-than-air men, Lt.(jg) Ernest Dewitt Cody, 27, and Ensign Charles E. Adams, 38. Both men had survived the crash of USS Macon in 1935.

The men routinely established radio contact with Moffett Field and began their normal ASN search procedures.

Almost two hours after take-off, at 7:50 a.m., Lt.(jg) Cody reported to Moffett Field that he had sighted an oil slick five miles east of the Farallon Islands and was going down to investigate.

Fifteen minutes later, Moffett Field failed to establish radio contact with L-3. After repeated attempts to raise L-3 on the radio were unsuccessful, Moffett called NAS Alameda and reported an emergency.

Two USN search planes took off from Alameda and headed west to the Farallons.

Over the ocean a heavy overcast was socked in tight with only a 500 ft. ceiling. The search planes informed Moffett they intended to fly over the cloud cover. They saw nothing.

(MORE)



At 11:15 a.m., Moffett Field received a call from the Daly City police. L-8 was lying in a residential street, and would the Navy kindly do something about it.

III

Late reports and investigation placed together some of the flight path of L-8 after reporting the oil slick off the Farallons.

Near the area of the oil slick, a Coast Guard cutter and a Naval vessel were conducting their separate operations. Neither appears to have taken any notice of the blimp.

At least one of several fishing boats in the area, however, took a great deal of notice. The Captain reported seeing L-8 come down close to the ocean and drop two smoke flares. As the blimp turned toward the fishing boat, the Captain decided to stand clear of the area. He thought the blimp was going to drop bombs.

But L-8 simply flew off into the overcast.

For two and a half hours thereafter, no one saw or heard from L-8. Sometime during this period, Lt(jg) Cody and Ensign Adams disappeared.

At 10:20 a.m., a Pan American Airways Clipper sighted the blimp flying aimlessly above the clouds.

At 10:30, a flight of Kingfishers which had taken off earlier in the day from Moffett Field, reported seeing L-8 break through the overcast at 3,000 ft. L-8 descended again into the clouds and the Kingfishers lost sight of it.

(MORE)

At 10:45, the blimp was seen from Fort Funston, flying low about a mile away inland from the shore. Fort Funston is located between the ocean and Lake Merrick, just north of Daly City.

The blimp drifted in toward the beach on a strong sea wind. It touched down at the beach on the grounds of the Olympic Club Golf Course. Some bathers in the area attempted to reach the blimp and hold it down.

The impact of striking the beach, however, dislodged one of the two depth bombs carried by L-8. Having deposited the depth bomb on the golf course, the blimp was lightened enough to become airborne once more, and flew off into the clouds again before the bathers could reach it.

L-8 was next seen by John Scotto of Daly City at 11 a.m., as it landed in the street.

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Newspapers cried out "Blimp Down in Daly City, Search Started for Crew", "Mystery Veils Fate of Wrecked Blimp Crew", "Navy Blimp Mishap Held Top Secret", and later "Blimp Mystery Still Unsolved", and finally "Long Search for Blimp Crew Ends".

There was much talk of the Flying Dutchman. Some thought the blimp had struck the water and the crew had drowned. Some thought the men had simply fallen out, others that they had jumped.

Except to say the mishap was a "first" and that it was under investigation, the Navy remained silent. But finally the results of the investigation became known.

(MORE)

## V

But for those who sought enlightenment, the results of the investigation into the fate of L-8 were as puzzling as the mishap itself.

The blimp had so far had an interesting history. Originally she was named Ranger III and belonged to Goodyear. She was sold to the Navy in January or February of 1942, and in May was delivered to Moffett Field.

Later that year, piloted by Lt(jg) Ernest Cody, L-8 rendezvoused with the aircraft carrier Hornet enroute for the Jimmy Doolittle raid on Tokyo. L-8 dropped 300 pounds of navigation bombs to Hornet at sea.

Then in August, L-8, with Cody and Adams aboard, made her ill-fated flight.

The first thing obvious to investigators was that at some time during the two and a half hours when the crew disappeared, L-8 had reached her pressure height.

The partially deflated condition of the blimp as it drifted in over Daly City indicated L-8 had reached her pressure height, automatically valved some of her gas, and descended. This caused the strange buckling amidship.

The salvage party from Moffett Field discovered the L-8 was in good condition. The windows of the car were all closed, but the cabin door was open. Bystanders said the door was open when the blimp landed in the street. The engines had not been operating during the landing.

(MORE)

Investigators found the two propellers badly bent. But they had not been bent while rotating. One depth bomb was missing, but that, of course, was found at the Olympic Club Golf Course. The radio, however, was in perfect working order.

The parachutes and rubber life raft were all intact and in their places. A portfolio of classified documents was in its proper place in the car. Investigators determined the car had not at any time been in the water.

Further investigation revealed plenty of gasoline in the tanks. Of the two throttles, one was full open, the other half open, which indicated L-8 had been, somewhere, in the process of making a turn. The ignition switches were still on. The engines were in operating condition. They just weren't running.

One of the officer's caps was laying on a window ledge. The only things missing were the crew and their Mae West life jackets.

No real determination was ever made as to what exactly had happened aboard L-8 between 7:50 and 10:20 a.m., August 16, 1942.

On August 16, 1942, Lt(jg) Cody and Ensign Adams were declared missing. They were never heard from again. On August 17, 1943, they were presumed dead.

## VI

L-8 was hauled back to Moffett Field and put back together and returned to service.

(MORE)

She became one of the training blimps at Moffett Field until May 15, 1946, when she was repurchased from the Navy by Goodyear. In 1947, she went back into service with the Goodyear fleet.

\* \* \*

To this day no one knows what became of Cody and Adams, or what strange fate they met over the ocean one Sunday morning in 1942.

our way 1971  
Jan.

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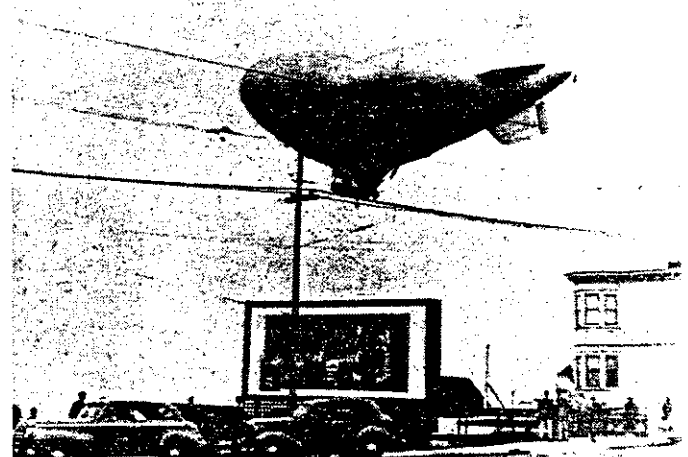
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*Continued on page 61*



*The partially deflated Navy airship L-8 drifts over Daly City, Calif. on August 16, 1942.*



*"Phantom Blimp Without Crew Crashes In Daly City, Calif. After Drifting Ashore," said the local headlines.*

where

from page 8



The deflated L-8 in a Daly City St.

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The control car was in good shape

L-8 between 7:50 and 10:20 a.m., August 16, 1942.

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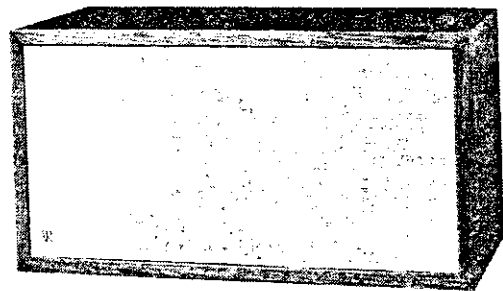
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## The Critics' Choice...

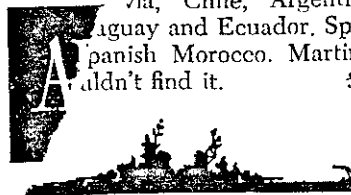
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Report of Inquiry - L-8 is in National Archives

includes photos

Names of men were: Ernest Dewitt Cody  
Charles Ellis Adams

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Riddle of the L-8.

in

NA News - August 1958  
pp 10-11

No extra copies available to  
you - only 1 copy on file  
E.M. 8/15/63

From Appendix EE - Squadron Accident Record

|                |   |
|----------------|---|
| Ship           | L-8   |
| Flight Captain | Lt(jg) Cody, 488.3 hrs.   |
| Date and Time  | 16 Aug 1942   |
| Place of Acc.  | Daly City, California   |
| Narrative      | The L-8 took off from Treasure Island on a routine patrol flight. The ship was seen in the vicinity of the Farallon Islands inspection an oil slick in the area. The ship was next seen drifting over the coast near Fort Funston and it came to earth on a nearby golf course where one of the two bombs were knocked off. The ship went into the air again and descended in Daly City, California. The crew of the two were not aboard and have never been found. |

Note: The above are the only references pertinent to the "Riddle" made in the Squadron Historical Report. (ZP-32).  
AOVW. Jan 1958

*See Acc News Ltr, 1 Oct. 1942, p. 35.-*

*Reports that the L-8 aircraft was repaired and put into service after its return without crew. Has a brief summary of the "crash under mysterious circumstances." (As mentioned in earlier letters).*

*Men on board L-8 were Ltjg Ernest Duwitt Cody and crew Charles Ellis Adams.*

*See NANA News, August 1958, pp 10-11.*

"Any news of the crew?" Watson demanded.

"Two men jumped off when she hit the beach," came the reply.

With relief, the Commander settled back. He would go and bring her home when she finally came down. Meanwhile, he wondered why Cody and Adams had abandoned her—but, of course, their report would clear up the confusion.

Close on the heels of the Army message came a call from the police chief of Daly City. The L-8 had made a perfect two-point landing in the street. Police and firemen had searched her thoroughly, even cutting into the helium envelope, but, to their astonishment, had found no one inside.

Watson assured the police chief that the men were safe and promised to come over immediately with a salvage crew. Before leaving, he called Navy Intelligence and asked them to check the vicinity for damage claims. Then he and the salvage crew left for Daly City.

While the blimp was being prepared for her journey back to base, Cody and Adams still did not appear. Watson became increasingly impatient for their report, for it now was evident that the L-8 was in perfect condition, and there seemed no reason why she should have been abandoned. The men had now had sufficient time to come up from the beach.

Then Watson was called to the phone. It was Navy Intelligence. They had checked every boat and person who had seen the blimp—including the surf fishermen—and, as a consequence, were compelled to contradict the earlier report of the Station. Cody and Adams had *not* been on board the L-8 when she hit the beach.

Apparently the Army had mistaken the two fishermen, who had tried to hold her, for the crew. Now alarmed, Watson called Moffett Field and ordered a search of the area. By this time, five hours had passed since the two men had been heard from.

When the salvage crew returned the derelict blimp to her hangar, the gondola was placed on a spotless cloth and an exhaustive search was begun to uncover some clue. But the only result was to deepen the mystery.

The car was immaculate, from the shiny waxed deck to the neatly stowed parachutes and rubber life raft. Even the most trivial items were in order. Nothing was missing but the two yellow life jackets, required wearing apparel on all overwater flights.

The gondola door was fastened back as if the crew had opened it for some purpose. The radio transmitter was still at "on" position, but the battery was exhausted.

In the bottom of every L-type blimp car, beneath the deck, there was an empty space that was far from watertight and contained only a few control wires. Watson knelt to examine this compartment. He ran a

finger over the bottom and then held it up for all to see. The layer of dust on his finger spoke eloquently. The complete lack of moisture was almost positive proof that the L-8 had never once touched water.

For weeks, the Navy combed the coastline, and civilians kept deluging headquarters with bits of clothing that might have belonged to Cody or Adams. But neither the bodies nor any positively identified part of their apparel were ever found.

Why did both occupants of a perfectly safe airship quit her in such haste that they failed even to put on their parachutes? How could they have vanished without trace from a blimp hovering over a calm channel dotted with boats? How could they have failed to be sighted by someone, dressed as they were in brilliant yellow life jackets? It all seemed fantastic.

Perhaps the most plausible explanation came from Watson. Besides being in command at the time, he had had years of experience with L-type aircraft.

Since the last message received from Cody was "am investigating oil slick," the usual procedure would have been for co-pilot Adams to drop a smoke tracer to mark the spot. The L-8's windows were small, and he might have gone back and opened the door.

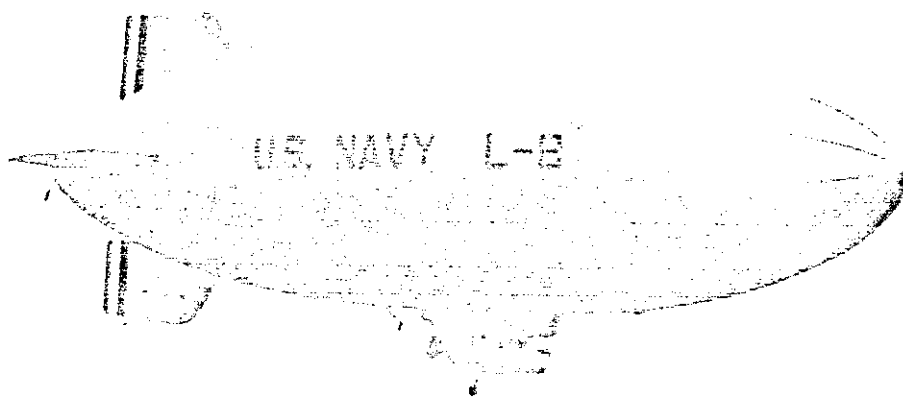
Kneeling in the aperture, leaning out to make his throw accurate, he could have slipped, grabbed the side of the blimp, and shouted to Cody. The latter, hearing his mate's cry, probably would have left the controls and rushed to offer assistance. Then, as Cody was trying to pull Adams aboard, he might have lost his balance at a moment when no one happened to be looking.

Their bodies, hurtling from a height of some 300 feet, would have sunk at once, so badly broken that they would never have returned to the surface.

This, Watson felt, was the best possible explanation. It is the one accepted by the Navy as "official." Nevertheless, the Navy admits that this explanation does not answer two important questions: (1) Why did no one see Cody and Adams fall, when the men on board the patrol ships were scrutinizing their every move; and (2) even though they might have been badly battered, why wasn't *some* trace of them ever found?

The fact remains that, for reasons unknown, the two officers were parted from the L-8. What followed was merely a cycle of events resulting from common physical laws. Relieved of the weight of their bodies, the airship quickly rose. The helium inside the envelope expanded until the pressure finally popped the safety valves, and enough gas was lost to make her heavy. She then fell straight down until she hit the beach. Losing the depth charge made her light again, and she was carried by the wind to Daly City.

Thus ended the crewless cruise of the L-8, and the fate of her two-man crew still remains a mystery.



## RIDDLE OF THE AIRSHIP L-8

THE AIRSHIP L-8 took off from Treasure Island, Calif., at 0600 August 16, 1942 on an antisubmarine patrol. At 1100 the same day it came to earth unmanned in the streets of Daly City. No trace of its pilots, Ltjg. Ernest D. Cody and Ens. Charles E. Adams, has been uncovered in the succeeding 16 years.

Few cases on record equal the mysterious disappearance of the pilots, but investigation of the flight revealed this chain of circumstances:

At 0750 Ltjg. Cody radioed the sighting of an oil slick just five miles east of the Farallon Islands and reported that he was about to investigate it. An attempt was made to contact the L-8 at 0805. When radio contact could not be established, two OS2U search planes were launched from Alameda to investigate.

The airplanes found a 500-foot ceiling over the area and decided to stay on top of the clouds.

Moffett Field received a telephone call from Fort Funston about 1045, reporting that an airship had landed there. The report said two men had gotten out of the airship and that it had taken off again.

Half an hour later, word was received at Moffett that the L-8 had settled to earth at Daly City with no crewmen on board.

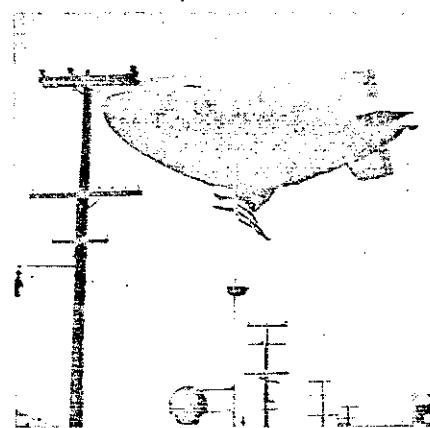
A salvage party from Moffett found the ship in fair condition. The envel-

ope was deflated because the gas that had remained after the ship's free balloon flight had escaped when firemen slashed the envelope to see if anyone was inside.

The blimp's car (crew and equipment compartment) was in good condition, but the cabin door was open. One bomb was missing. The radio was operative, indicating that the cabin had possibly been unmanned as early as 0805 when Moffett tried to contact the airship. *Yet Fort Funston's report said two persons debarked from the blimp at 1045.*

The motors were stopped, although one throttle was open and the other half-open. Ignition switches were still turned on. The propellers were bent, but from all signs, had not been

PARTLY DEFLATED, L-8 COMES TO EARTH



bent while rotating. Rubber life jackets were missing, but the life raft was in place. The classified document portfolio was in order, and there was evidence that the car had not been immersed in the sea.

There was no indication of fire. Plenty of fuel was aboard and the valves to the engines were open.

Concern for the safety of the crew mounted when it was learned that they had not landed at Fort Funston. The 1045 report had been in error. Investigators learned that what had actually happened about a mile from the fort was this: the airship drifted in from the Pacific and, descending slowly, struck the beach. Two bathers saw the ship coming down and attempted to seize the handling lines.

When the ship hit the earth, a bomb was knocked off, giving the craft enough static lift to send it on its way to Daly City, its next stop.

The bathers established the fact that when the L-8 drifted in from the sea there was nobody on board. The engines were stopped at that time and the gondola door was open.

Continuing the inquiry, investigators learned that when the airship investigated the oil slick, there was a Coast Guard boat, a Navy craft and several fishing boats in the immediate vicinity. Boat crewmen saw the airship come down low, drop two smoke flares, then fly off into the overcast.

There was no doubt in the minds of the boats' officers that the airship was under complete control at that time. One boat was so near the L-8 that it made every attempt to stand clear of the area because the skipper thought the airship was about to drop bombs.

At 1020 a Pan American Airways clipper sighted the airship. Ten minutes later, one of the *Kingfishers* sent out by Moffett Air Control saw the blimp break through the overcast at 2000 feet, then descend into it again. The L-8 was undoubtedly not under control when sighted by the Navy plane because the pressure height of the ship was 1000 feet.

There end the *known* facts of the crew's disappearance. Ltjg. Cody and Ens. Adams were declared missing August 16, 1942, and presumed dead as of August 17, 1943.

A great deal of conjecture has been voiced in the succeeding 16 years. It is evident that the officers disappeared between the time the airship was seen by the surface craft and the time it landed on the beach.

That an enemy submarine could have surfaced and surprised the crew while they were investigating the oil slick is most improbable because of the great amount of surface craft activity in the area. Such a surfacing would surely have been seen.

The submarine theory may be discounted still further because no enemy submarines were reported in the area and the classified folder was secure when the blimp landed.

The most logical theory is that the



CAR WITH BOMB ATTACHED IS UNDAMAGED

crew's disappearance was accidental and unintentional. Both knew that because of the prevailing winds they could free-balloon back to the mainland if trouble was encountered. Had they experienced difficulty with the airship, it is inconceivable that they would abandon it immediately, especially without radioing their intention to do so. Further, no evidence of trouble, except the dead motors, was found when the ship was salvaged.

The usual explanation is that at some time during the flight one of the officers might have leaned out of the car, lost his balance, and fallen part way out. The other then rushed to his aid and during the struggle to get back into the car, both fell from the ship. The open door is regarded as

fairly good proof that they left the ship by means of it.

The position of the throttles does not tend to verify this theory, for the pilot would certainly not leave one engine full on and the other halfway so when he went back to pull his companion into the ship.

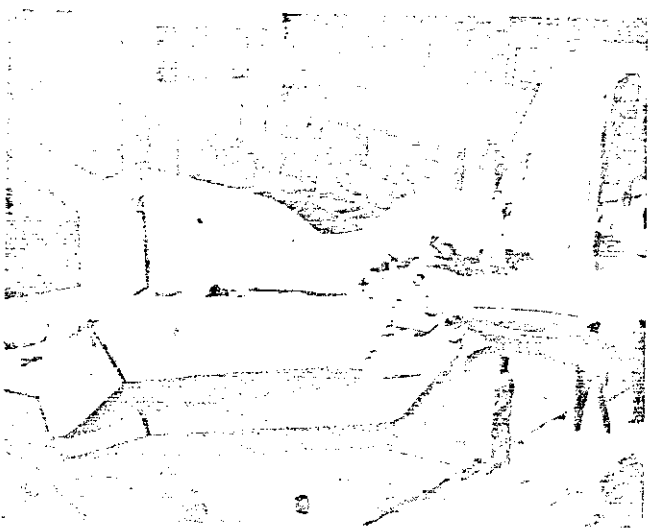
However, the throttle positions might be justified if the motors were dead. That condition would also justify the theory of why one of the pilots climbed out onto the outrigger. It is also possible that the motors had been idling and had simply choked out; that the throttle positions could have been caused by the Daly City firemen climbing over the L-8 when it landed.

But one theory not answered in the investigation report is this: With good evidence that both pilots were wearing life jackets, and with the sea heavily patrolled by surface craft, why were their bodies never found? If they were picked up, who did it?

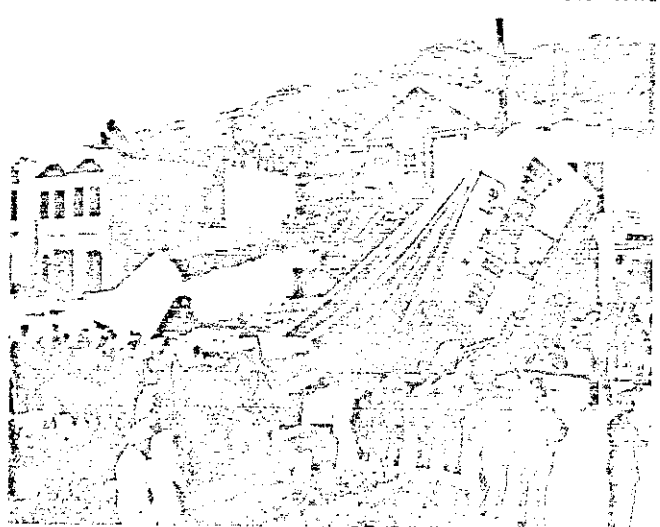
The L-8 was salvaged and returned to service. Before the phantom flight, the airship had been piloted by Ltjg. Cody to a rendezvous with the carrier *Hornet* as that ship steamed from the West Coast to conduct the Doolittle Raid on Tokyo. The L-8 dropped 300 pounds of navigator domes to the *Hornet* at sea.

After its crack-up in August, the L-8 saw a great deal of service in covering amphibious landings at Camp Pendleton, Calif., then it was returned to Moffett and placed into service as one of the training ships for a new lighter-than-aircraft training program.

ENVELOPE LIES COLLAPSED AFTER BEING RUPTURED BY FIREMEN



WITNESSES TO PHANTOM LANDING SPECULATE ON PILOTS' FATE



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## The Mystery of the L-8

By Irwin Ross

*The missing Navy blimp, her gondola empty and door locked open, finally came to rest on a street in Daly City, California.*



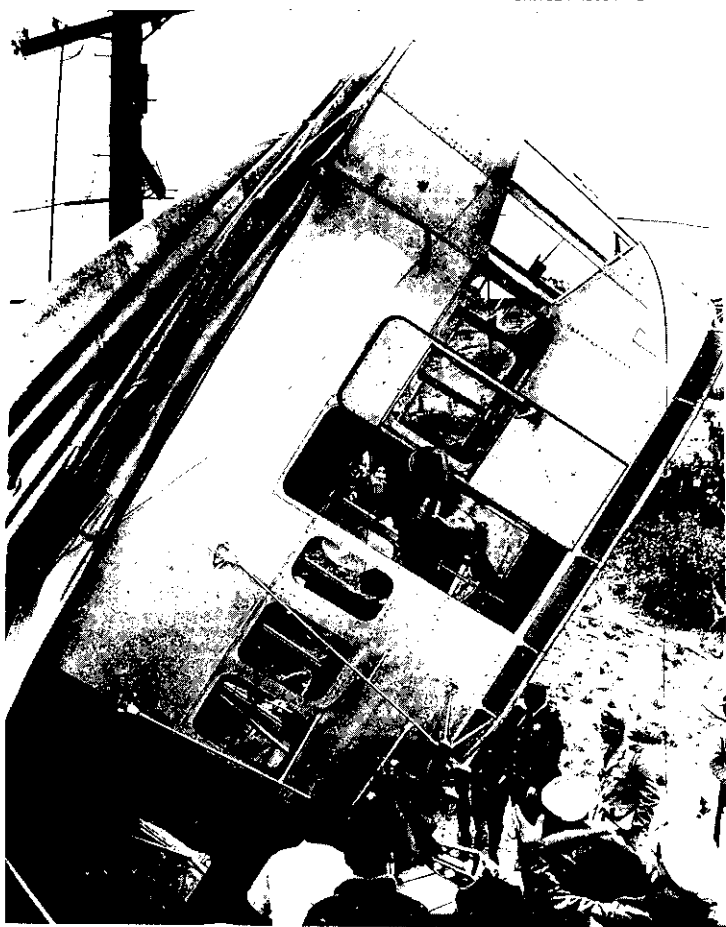
On a calm but overcast Sunday in August 1942, two experienced officers took off on an antisubmarine patrol flight in the U. S. Navy blimp, L-8. They left the small advance base on Treasure Island, California, in the dim, early hours, and those watching the ship disappear into the haze never suspected that a few hours later she would present one of the most baffling mysteries of modern times.

Her two-man crew, Lieutenant (j.g.) Ernest W. Cody and Ensign Charles E. Adams, were in fine spirits that morning. After some 15 years in the Navy, Adams had finally been commissioned, and this was his first flight as an ensign. It made the patrol more than routine. As they flew low to investigate any surface or underwater abnormality, the two airmen waved to fishermen below.

When they passed over the entrance channel to San Francisco Bay, a few miles off Golden Gate Bridge, they were on the last two hours of their flight. Dotting the surface were the usual fishing craft, as well as two patrol boats, one Navy, the other Coast Guard. Suddenly, Cody noticed a smudge on the blue water. It was an oil slick, indicating the possible presence of a submarine. Cody circled and came in over it.

On board the patrol boats, all eyes were trained on the blimp, while the skippers ordered full speed ahead. The fishermen, too, hastened to get away, in case a depth charge should be dropped.

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But, to the surprise of the watchers, the airship neither circled a second time nor bombed. Instead, she shot upward into the clouds. They never saw her again.

Continuing to rise, the L-8 presently emerged from the cloud bank. For two-and-a-half hours she drifted at 2,500 feet, and then, becoming heavy, began to fall.

On the beach near an Army Coast Artillery patrol Station, two surf fishermen were casting. One glanced up and shouted at his companion. The blimp was falling on them, right out of the sky. When she hit the beach, practically at their feet, they grabbed her tie lines and tried to hold her. The gondola door was open and they looked inside. Everything was in perfect order, except for one thing—Lieutenant Cody and Ensign Adams were missing.

The two men were not strong enough to hold their rambunctious captive. Torn from their hands, she skidded across the beach and was brought up short against a precipice. There the wind played ball with her, bouncing her against the stone wall, until the continued shocks loosened one of her 300-pound depth charges. When the charge dropped off, the ship, now light enough to ascend, soared above the cliff and disappeared.

About 15 minutes later, she landed gently on a street in Daly City, a suburb of San Francisco.

Back at squadron headquarters on Moffett Field, Operations had been trying to raise the L-8 by radio. The last word from Cody had been received at 7:50 a.m. when he had radioed, "Am investigating oil slick." There should have been a follow-up report on this investigation, but it did not come; nor did his position report, due at 8 o'clock.

The blimp's persistent silence was attributed at first to the failure of her radio. No particular worry was felt at Headquarters, since the day was calm and Cody had not indicated any trouble. However, as the minutes ticked by, Lieutenant Commander Watson, Squadron Commander, became increasingly puzzled. The atmosphere at the base grew tense; the men in the office were growing restless.

When the blimp failed to report at 9:30, as scheduled, Watson alerted all nearby ships and planes. Although Operations was worried, no one thought that Cody and Adams were in real danger. Both had had considerable lighter-than-air experience and would know what to do in case of trouble.

Then the first message came in. An airplane pilot, flying above the cloud bank, had caught sight of the L-8, apparently out of control. He did not know if her crew were all right because, before he could get close enough to see, she had dropped into the clouds.

The second report was received an hour later from the artillery patrol station, which declared that the L-8 had landed, hit the precipice, and then disappeared.

UNCLASSIFIED

8 August 1943

LTA

1-1

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

*Downgraded to Unclassified  
by authority Chinfo - 12/12/57.*

*all Vanc. Jm.*

FLEET AIRSHIPS, ATLANTIC  
INTELLIGENCE BULLETIN NUMBER 2

FILE COPY  
AVIATION HISTORY UNIT

*Return to  
ops OSAS 28.*

THE RIDDLE OF THE L-8

At 0600 on 16 August 1942, the L-8, of Airship Squadron Thirty-Two, took off on a patrol mission. Five hours later, the airship drifted in from the sea and floated to earth empty in the streets of Daly City, California. No trace has ever been found of the crew of the L-8 and their disappearance is today as much of a mystery as it was when it occurred.

So great has been the interest in the L-8's mystery flight that this bulletin is being issued to give lighter-than-air personnel as clear a picture as possible of what actually happened. The riddle of what became of the two officers on board has never been answered, but here (with approximate times) are the known facts of the case.

Squadron Thirty-Two, located at Moffett Field, California, was operating the L-8 from a mast on Treasure Island. On the morning of 16 August, a heavy dew made the ship considerably heavy at weigh-off and for this reason, only two officers went aboard as the crew. The L-ships on the West Coast carried a crew of two or three officers, depending upon the static condition of the ship. On that morning the two officers were Lt. Ernest D. Cody, USN, and Ensign Charles E. Adams, USN, both experienced and capable airship pilots.

At 0750, almost 2 hours after the ship had taken off for patrol, a radio message was received from the L-8. It stated in substance: "investigating suspicious oil slick, stand by". The airship's position at that time was about 5 miles east of the Farallon Islands; oil slicks in that area are common.

At 0805, attempts were begun to contact the L-8; all failed. Air control at Alameda sent out two OS2U's to investigate the situation. The planes found a 500 foot ceiling and preferred to stay on top of it rather than to go down through it in search of the ship.

About 1045 Moffett Field received a telephone call from Fort Funston reporting that an airship had landed there, two men had gotten out, and the ship had taken off again.

A half an hour after Fort Funston called, word was received by phone from Daly City that the L-8, with no one on board, had settled to earth in the city streets.

Moffett Field salvage party found the ship in fair condition. The envelope was deflated because what gas remained after the ship's free balloon flight, had escaped when the Daly City Fire Department slashed

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## The Riddle of the L-8 cont'd

the envelope to see if anybody was inside. The condition of the car was good. One bomb was missing. The radio was operative. The motors were stopped although one throttle was open and the other, half-way so. The ignition switches were on. The propellers were bent but from all signs had not been bent while rotating. The rubber life jackets were missing (to be expected as the crew wore them over water) but the life raft was in place. The confidential portfolio was in order. The car had not been immersed in the sea. There was no indication of fire. Plenty of fuel was aboard, and the valves were open to the engines. The cabin door was open.

Alarm grew for the safety of the officers of the L-8 when it was learned that they had not landed at Fort Funston and that the earlier phone call to that effect has been in error. What had actually happened about a mile from the Fort was this. The airship drifted in from the Pacific and, descending slowly, struck a beach. Two bathers saw the ship coming down and attempted to seize the handling lines. When the ship hit the ground, a bomb was knocked off thus giving the craft sufficient static lift to send it on its way to Daly City, its next stop. The bathers established the fact that when the L-8 drifted in from the sea, there was nobody on board, the engines were stopped, and the gondola door was open.

When the airship had investigated the oil slick, there were a Coast Guard boat, a Navy craft, and several fishing boats in the immediate vicinity. They saw the ship come down low, drop two smoke flares, and then ascend and fly off into the overcast. There was no doubt in the minds of the officers on those boats that the airship was under complete control at that time. One boat was so near the L-8 that it made every attempt to get away to a safe distance because it thought the airship was about to drop bombs.

At 1020 a Pan American Airways clipper sighted the airship and a few minutes later (1030) one of the OS2Us sent out by Air Control saw the L-8 break through the overcast at 2000 feet, then descend into it again. The blimp was undoubtedly not under control when sighted by the OS2U because the pressure height of the ship was 1000 feet.

Such are the known facts of the L-8's flight. Here the conjecture begins. It is quite evident that the mishap to Lieutenant Cody and Ensign Adams occurred between the time the airship was seen by the surface craft to rise into the overcast and its landing on the beach. That an enemy submarine could have popped up and surprised the L-8 while it was investigating the oil slick, is most improbable because of the great amount of surface craft activity in the immediate vicinity. Any such occurrence would have certainly been seen. The submarine theory is still further discounted because no enemy submarines have been reported in the area and the confidential folder was secure.

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### The Riddle of the L-8 cont'd

The most logical theory - and it is only a theory - is that the crew's disappearance was entirely accidental and unintentional. Both officers knew that, because of the prevailing winds, they could free balloon back to the mainland if in trouble. If they had experienced difficulty with the airship, it is inconceivable that they would immediately abandon it, especially without radioing their intention to do so. Furthermore, no evidence of trouble, except the dead motors, were found when the ship was salvaged.

The usual explanation is that at some time during the flight, one of the officers may have leaned out of the car, lost his balance, and fallen part way out. The other then rushed to his aid and that during the struggle to get back into the car, both fell from the ship. The open door is regarded as fairly good proof that they left the ship by means of it. The position of the throttles does not tend to verify this theory for the pilot would certainly not leave one engine full on and the other half way so when he went back to pull his companion into the ship. However, the throttle positions might be justified if the motors were dead which could be a reason for one of the crew to climb out onto the outrigger. It is possible that the motors had been idling and had simply choked out; the throttle positions could have been caused by the Daly City Fire Department as it clambered over the ship.

Many theories have been advanced as to what actually happened on that flight but almost all agree that it was a freak accident of some kind. The mystery is heightened by the fact that although both officers were obviously wearing life belts, their bodies were never found. Could the men have been picked up? If so, by whom??

Such are the facts that are known about the ship's flight. The problem of what actually happened remains unsolved and is a matter of conjecture.

The above information has been obtained through informal conversations with the former Commanding Officer of Squadron Thirty-Two.

From Appendix EE - Squadron Accident Record

|                |   |
|----------------|---|
| Ship           | L-8   |
| Flight Captain | Lt(jg) Cody, 488.3 hrs.   |
| Date and Time  | 16 Aug 1942   |
| Place of Acc.  | Daly City, California   |
| Narrative      | The L-8 took off from Treasure Island on a routine patrol flight. The ship was seen in the vicinity of the Farallon Islands inspection an oil slick in the area. The ship was next seen drifting over the coast near Fort Funston and it came to earth on a nearby golf course where one of the two bombs were knocked off. The ship went into the air again and descended in Daly City, California. The crew of the two were not aboard and have never been found. |

Note: The above are the only references pertinent to the "Riddle" made in the Squadron Historical Report.

AOVW. Jan 1958

Note: Lt Cody and Enr Adams were reported missing 16 Aug 1942 and presumed dead on 17 Aug 1943. Cody's NOK address was given as Akron, Ohio; Adams' as Mountain View, Calif.

Source: Bu pers Casualty Section  
*[Signature]*

## THE RIDDLE OF THE L-8

Notes from ZP-32 Historical Reports, World War II.  
From the Chronology:

- 5 Mar 1942 L-8 was accepted by the squadron. Was the former Goodyear commercial airship "Rainbow", which had not yet been assembled and was forwarded to Moffett Field from Akron, Ohio.
- 8 Mar 1942 L-8 began operations from ZP-32's first auxiliary base at Treasure Island.
- 11 Apr 1942 L-8 with Lt. jg E.D. Cody pilot and C.B.M. Desmond crew, dropped 300 pounds of freight on the deck of the USS Hornet, which had departed San Francisco about 1100. (Note that Hornet was then enroute Japan for Doolittle's Raid on Tokyo.)\*

From the Narrative:

On 16 August, the L-8 settled to earth at Daly City, California, with no crew aboard. The L-8 had taken off from Treasure Island several hours before and had been assigned a routine patrol. When the ship crashed, its engines were dead, but there was adequate fuel with the valves open, and the radio equipment was operative. The ship had apparently drifted with the wind toward land, had exceeded its pressure height, then settled slowly to earth. No trace of its crew, Lt. jg. Cody and Ensign Adams, has ever been found, and there are no indications as to what may have happened to them.

The L-8 was salvaged after the crash and on 31 August, was completely repaired and test flown. On 5 September, it was transferred to Watsonville and L-ship operations were resumed from that base.

...the services of a Blimp Squadron thirty two airship were requested for the coverage of amphibious landings at Camp Pendleton, California. The L-8 was made available and spent two weeks in October at Santa Ana and Oceanside, Calif. The L-8 suffered considerable damage on one landing during this period, but was repaired at Santa Ana, and the operation with Camp Pendleton was continued. The L-8 returned to Moffett Field on 31 October and on 1 November was transferred to NAS Moffett Field, where it went into service as one of the training ships for the new Moffett Field lighter-than-air training program. The L-3 had made 360 flights with the Squadron for a total of 1607.2 hours.

\* Action Rept for Tokyo Raid states that the freight was  
2 boxes of Navigator Domes. (Info from Ch. M. W. Cagle).

## Flight To Nowhere

John Scotto had left his house and was walking along the narrow suburban street in Daly City, California. It was a quiet Sunday morning, the sun just beginning to warm the August air an hour before noon. Glancing up, stopped and stared. A partially deflated blimp was drifting towards him, obviously descending.

The blimp settled gently toward the street, scraped across some power lines, and fell to the pavement. A crowd quickly gathered, and some of the men held the blimp down until the police and fire department had been called.

When the fire department arrived it was discovered there was no one aboard the blimp. Firemen slashed open the gas bag to see if anyone was inside.

Inside the car an officer's cap was laying on a shelf, a half-eaten sandwich lay on the floor and a still-warm cup of coffee had spilled across some papers. Everything seemed just as it should be, except there were no men.

The police called Moffett Field.

At 6 a.m., Sunday, August 16, 1942, the U.S. Navy blimp L-8 had taken off on a routine patrol from the Naval Station Treasure Island. L-8, attached to a Moffett Field squadron, was on detached duty to Treasure Island.

Aboard the blimp were two experienced lighter-than-air men, Lt. (jg) Ernest Dewitt Cody, 27, and Ensign Charles E. Adams, 38. Both men had survived the crash of USS Macon in 1935.

The men routinely established radio contact with Moffett Field and began their normal ASW search procedures.

Almost two hours after take-off, at 7:50 a.m., Lt. (jg) Cody reported to Moffett Field that he had sighted an oil slick five miles east of the Farallon

Islands and was going down to investigate.

Fifteen minutes later, Moffett Field failed to establish radio contact with L-8. After repeated attempts to raise L-3 on the radio were unsuccessful, Moffett called NAS Alameda and reported an emergency.

Two OS2U search planes took off from Alameda and headed west to the Farallons.

Over the ocean a heavy overcast was socked in tight with only a 500 ft. ceiling. The search planes informed Moffett they intended to fly over the cloud cover. They saw nothing.

At 11:15 a.m., Moffett Field received a call from the Daly City police. L-8 was laying in a residential street, and would the Navy kindly do something about it.

Late reports and investigation pieced together some of the flight path of L-8 after reporting the oil slick off the Farallons.

Near the area of the oil slick a Coast Guard cutter and a Naval vessel were conducting their separate operations. Neither appears to have taken much notice of the blimp.

At least one of several fishing boats in the area, however, took a great deal of notice. The Captain reported seeing L-8 come down close to the ocean and drop two smoke flares. As the blimp turned toward the fishing boat, the Captain decided to stand clear of the area. He thought the blimp was going to drop bombs.

But L-8 simply flew off into the overcast.

For two and a half hours thereafter, no one saw or heard from L-8. Sometime during this period, Lt. (jg) Cody and Ensign Adams disappeared.

At 10:20 a.m., a Pan American Airways Clipper sighted the blimp flying aimlessly above the clouds.

At 10:30, a flight of Kingfishers which had taken off earlier in the day from Moffett Field, reported seeing L-8 break through the overcast at 2,000 ft. L-8 descended again into the clouds and the Kingfishers lost sight of it.

At 10:45, the blimp was seen from Fort Funston, flying low about a mile away headed for the shore. Fort Funston is located between the ocean and Lake Merced, just north of Daly City.

The blimp drifted in toward the beach on a strong sea wind. It touched down at the beach on the grounds of the Olympic Club Golf Course. Some bathers in the area attempted to reach the blimp and hold it down.

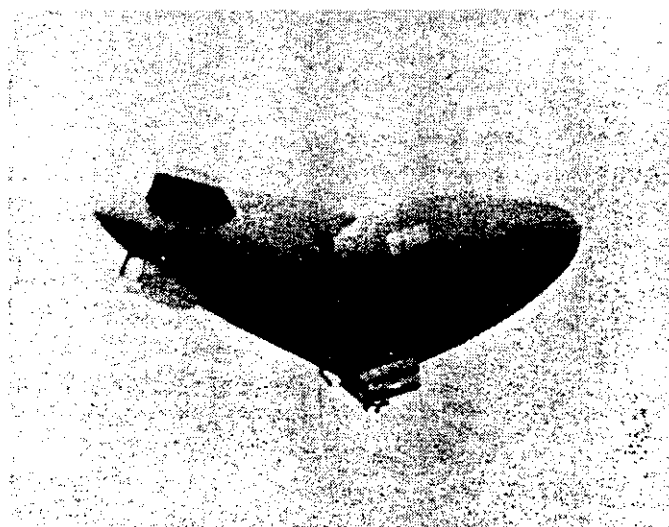
The impact of striking the beach, however, dislodged one of the two depth bombs carried by L-8. Having deposited the depth bomb on the golf course, the blimp was lightened enough to become airborne once more, and flew off into the clouds again before the bathers could reach it.

L-8 was next seen by John Scotto of Daly City at 11 a.m., as it landed in the street.

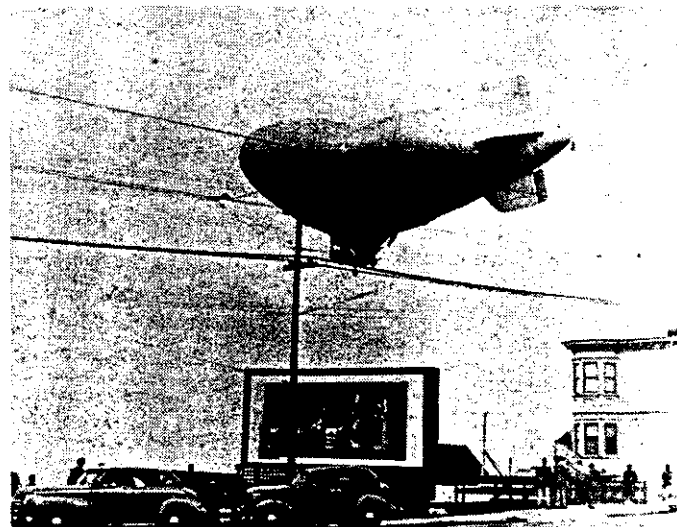
Newspapers cried out "Blimp Down in Daly City, Search Started for Crew", "Mystery Veils Fate of Wrecked Blimp Crew", "Navy Blimp Mishap Held Unprecedented," and later "Blimp Mystery Still Unsolved", and finally "Land Search for Blimp Crew Ends".

There was much talk of the Flying Dutchman. Some thought the blimp had struck the water and the crew had drowned. Some thought the men had simply fallen out, others thought that

*Continued on page 61*



*The partially deflated Navy airship L-8 drifts over Daly City, Calif. on August 16, 1942.*



*"Phantom Blimp Without Crew Crashes In Daly City, Calif. After Drifting Ashore," said the local headlines.*

## Nowhere

from page 8



The deflated L-8 in a Daly City St.

they had jumped.

Except to say the mishap was a "first" and that it was under investigation, the Navy remained silent. But finally the results of the investigation became known.

But for those who sought enlightenment, the results of the investigation into the fate of L-8 were as puzzling as the mishap itself.

The blimp had so far had an interesting history. Originally she was named Ranger III and belonged to Goodyear. She was sold to the Navy in January or February of 1942, and in May was delivered to Moffett Field.

Later that year, piloted by Lt. (jg) Ernest Cody, L-8 rendezvoused with the aircraft carrier Hornet enroute for the Jimmy Doolittle raid on Tokyo. L-8 dropped 300 pounds of navigation domes to Hornet at sea.

Then in August, L-8, with Cody and Adams aboard, made her ill-fated flight.

The first thing obvious to investigators was that at some time during the two and a half hours when the crew disappeared, L-8 had reached her pressure height.

The partially deflated condition of the blimp as it drifted in over Daly City indicated L-8 had reached her pressure height, automatically valved some of her gas, and descended. This caused the strange buckling amidship.

The salvage party from Moffett Field discovered the L-8 was in good condition. The windows of the car were all closed, but the cabin door was open. Bystanders said the door was open when the blimp landed in the street.



The engines had not been operating during the landing.

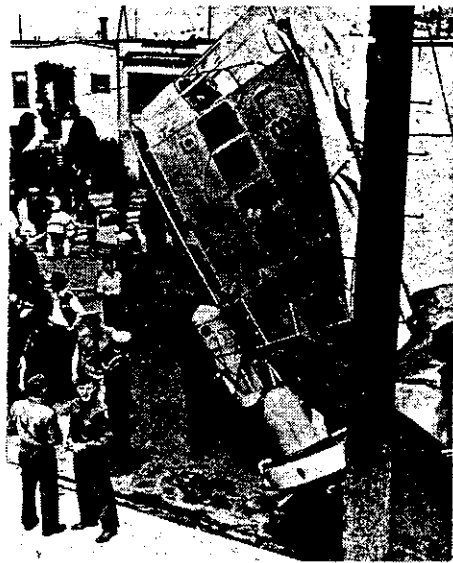
Investigators found the two propellers badly bent. But they had not been bent while rotating. One depth bomb was missing, but that, of course, was found at the Olympic Club Golf Course. The radio, however, was in perfect working order.

The parachutes and rubber life raft were all intact and in their places. A portfolio of classified documents was in its proper place in the car. Investigators determined the car had not at any time been in the water.

Further investigation revealed plenty of gasoline in the tanks. Of the two throttles, one was full open, the other half open, which indicated L-8 had been, somewhere, in the process of making a turn. The ignition switches were still on. The engines were in operating condition but not running.

One of the officer's caps was laying on a window ledge. The only things missing were the crew and their Mae West life jackets.

No real determination was ever made as to what exactly had happened aboard



The control car was in good shape

L-8 between 7:50 and 10:20 a.m., August 16, 1942.

On August 16, 1942, Lt. (jg) Cody and Ensign Adams were declared missing. They were never heard from again. On August 17, 1943, they were presumed dead.

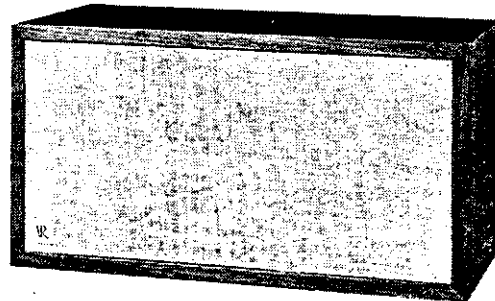
L-8 was hauled back to Moffett Field and put back together and returned to service.

She became one of the training blimps at Moffett Field until May 15, 1946, when she was repurchased from the Navy by Goodyear. In 1947, she went back into service with the Goodyear fleet.

To this day no one knows what became of Cody and Adams, or what strange fate they met over the ocean one Sunday morning in 1942. \*\*\*

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8 August 1943

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FLEET AIRSHIPS, ATLANTIC  
INTELLIGENCE BULLETIN NUMBER 2THE RIDDLE OF THE L-8

At 0600 on 16 August 1942, the L-8 of Airship Squadron Thirty-Two, took off on a patrol mission. Five hours later, the airship drifted in from the sea and floated to earth empty in the streets of Daly City, California. No trace had ever been found of the crew of the L-8 and their disappearance is today as much of a mystery as it was when it occurred.

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At 0750, almost 2 hours after the ship had taken off for patrol, a radio message was received from the L-8. It stated in substance: "Investigating suspicious oil slick, stand by". The airship's position at that time was about 5 miles east of the Farallon Islands; oil slicks in that area are common.

At 0805, attempts were begun to contact the L-8; all failed. Air control at

Alameda sent out two OS2Us to investigate the situation. The planes found a 500 foot ceiling and preferred to stay on top of it rather than to go down through it in search of the ship.

About 1045 Moffett Field received a telephone call from Fort Funston reporting that an airship had landed there, two men had gotten out, and the ship had taken off again.

A half an hour after Fort Funston called, word was received by phone from Daly City that the L-8, with no one on board, had settled to earth in the city streets.

Moffett Field salvage party found the ship in fair condition. The envelope was deflated because what gas remained after the ship's free balloon flight, had escaped when the Daly City Fire Department slashed the envelope to see if anybody was inside. The condition of the car was good. One bomb was missing. The radio was operative. The motors were stopped although one throttle was open and the other, half-way so. The ignition switches were on. The propellers were bent but from all signs had not been bent while rotating. The rubber life jackets were missing (to be expected as the crew wore them over water) but the life raft was in place. The confidential portfolio was in order. The car had not been immersed in the sea. There was no indication of fire. Plenty of fuel was aboard, and the valves were open to the engines. The cabin floor was open.

Alarm crew for the safety of the officers of the L-8 when it was learned that they had not landed at Fort Funston and that the earlier phone call to that effect had been in error. What had actually happened about a mile from the Fort was this. The airship drifted in from the Pacific and, descending slowly, struck a beach. Two bathers saw the ship coming down and attempted to seize the handling lines. When the ship hit the ground, a bomb was knocked off thus giving the craft sufficient static lift to send it on its way to Daly City, its next stop. The bathers established the fact that when the L-8 drifted in from the sea, there was nobody on board, the



engines were stopped, and the gondola door was open.

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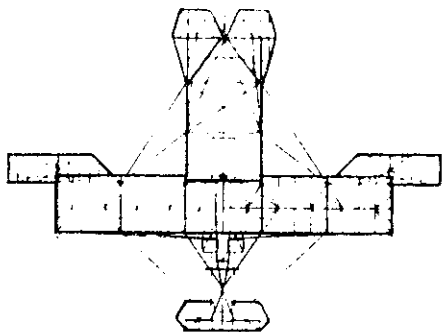
that they would immediately abandon it especially without radiating their intention to do so. Furthermore, no evidence of trouble, except the dead motors, were found when the ship was salvaged.

The usual explanation is that at some time during the flight, one of the officers may have leaned out of the car, lost his balance, and fallen part way out. The other then rushed to his aid and that during the struggle to get back into the car, both fell from the ship. The open door is regarded as fairly good proof that they left the ship by means of it. The position of the throttles does not tend to verify this theory for the pilot would certainly not leave one engine full on and the other half-way so when he went back to pull his companion into the ship. However, the throttle positions might be justified if the motors were dead which could be a reason for one of the crew to climb out onto the outrigger. It is possible that the motors had been idling and had simply choked out; the throttle positions could have been caused by the Daly City Fire Department as it clambered over the ship.

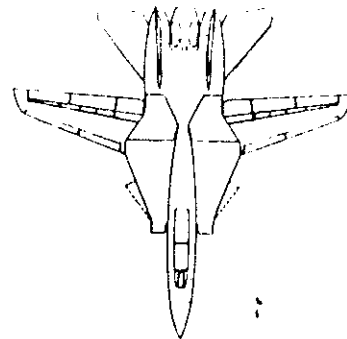
Many theories have been advanced as to what actually happened on that flight but almost all agree that it was a freak accident of some kind. The mystery is heightened by the fact that although both officers were obviously wearing life belts, their bodies were never found. Could the men have been picked up? If so, by whom?

Such are the facts that are known about the ship's flight. The problem of what actually happened remains unsolved and is a matter of conjecture.

The above information had been obtained through informal conversations with the former Commanding Officer of Squadron Thirty-Two.



Office of the Chief of Naval Operations  
Naval Aviation History  
Washington Navy Yard  
Building 146  
Washington, D. C. 20374



OP-05D2  
November 10, 1982


Ms. Lyn Sabin  
128 South Reeves, Apt. 3  
Beverly Hills, CA 90212

Dear Ms. Sabin:

A copy of your letter of September 28th to Ms. Anna Urban was forwarded to our office. I have enclosed a copy of the Board of Investigations on the L-8 and other miscellaneous information concerning the incident.

Good luck with your project.

Sincerely,

  
Roy A. Grossnick  
Historian

Enclosures

Copy to: (w/o encl)  
Ms. Anna Urban  
Assistant Head (Magazines/Books)  
Media Services Branch  
Office of Information  
Department of the Navy  
Washington, D.C. 20350

128 South Reeves Apt. 3  
Beverly Hills, CA 90212  
September 28, 1982

Anna Urband  
Office of Information  
Navy Department  
Washington, D.D. 20350  
A.H. CODE 0I213

Dear Ms. Urband:

I am considering producing a film based on the disappearance of crew members, Lieutenant Ernest Cody and Ensign Charles Adams from the patrol airship L-8, USS RANGER, on August 16, 1942 off the coast of San Francisco, California. The L-8, part of Airship Patrol Squadron 32, which although flying this day from the U.S. Naval Air Station on Treasure Island, originated from Moffett Air Station.

I understand that a special board of investigation was convened at Moffett Air Station two days after the incident to consider the evidence and to suggest what had happened to the lost crew members. I would very much like a copy of this preliminary investigation as well as all subsequent investigation reports pertaining to this tragic incident.

John Shackleton, Public Affairs Officer at Moffett, suggested that I direct this request to you. John advised me that you have done extensive research of this incident and are extremely knowledgeable about all the investigation reports and hearings.

I am aware that there is some research charge and I will be most happy to reimburse you for any expenses incurred.

Thank you very much.

Sincerely yours,

*Lyn Sabin*  
Lyn Sabin

FILE COPY  
AVIATION HISTORY UNIT

8 August 1943

*Declassified*  
*12/12/57*  
**UNCLASSIFIED**FLEET AIRSHIPS, ATLANTIC  
INTELLIGENCE BULLETIN NUMBER 2THE RIDDLE OF THE L-8

At 0600 on 16 August 1942, the L-8, of Airship Squadron Thirty-Two, took off on a patrol mission. Five hours later, the airship drifted in from the sea and floated to earth empty in the streets of Daly City, California. No trace has ever been found of the crew of the L-8 and their disappearance is today as much of a mystery as it was when it occurred.

So great has been the interest in the L-8's mystey flight that this bulletin is being issued to give lighter-than-air personnel as clear a picture as possible of what actually happened. The riddle of what became of the two officers on board has never been answered, but here (with approximate times) are the known facts of the case.

Squadron Thirty-Two, located at Moffett Field, California, was operating the L-8 from a mast on Treasure Island. On the morning of 16 August, a heavy dew made the ship considerably heavy at weigh-off and for this reason, only two officers went aboard as the crew. The L-ships on the west Coast carried a crew of two or three officers, depending upon the static condition of the ship. On that morning the two officers were Lieutenant Ernest D. Cody, USN, and Ensign Charles E. Adams, USN, both experienced and capable airship pilots.

At 0750, almost 2 hours after the ship had taken off for patrol, a radio message was received from the L-8. It stated in substance: "Investigating suspicious oil slick, stand by". The airship's position at that time was about 5 miles east of the Farallon Islands; oil slicks in that area are common.

At 0805, attempts were begun to contact the L-8; all failed. Air control at

sent out two OS2Us to investigate the situation. The planes found a 500 foot ceiling and preferred to stay on top of it rather than to go down through it in search of the ship.

About 1045 Moffett Field received a telephone call from Fort Funston reporting that an airship had landed there, two men had gotten out, and the ship had taken off again.

A half an hour after Fort Funston called, word was received by phone from Daly City that the L-8, with no one on board, had settled to earth in the city streets.

Moffett Field salvage party found the ship in fair condition. The envelope was deflated because what gas remained after the ship's free balloon flight, had escaped when the Daly City Fire Department slashed the envelope to see if anybody was inside. The condition of the car was good. One bomb was missing. The radio was operative. The motors were stopped although one throttle was open and the other, half-way so. The ignition switches were on. The propellers were bent but from all signs had not been bent while rotating. The rubber life jackets were missing (to be expected as the crew wore them over water) but the life raft was in place. The confidential portfolio was in order. The car had not been immersed in the sea. There was no indication of fire. Plenty of fuel was aboard, and the valves were open to the engines. The cabin door was open.

Alarm grew for the safety of the officers of the L-8 when it was learned that they had not landed at Fort Funston and that the earlier phone call to that effect had been in error. What had actually happened about a mile from the Fort was this. The airship drifted in from the Pacific and, descending slowly, struck a beach. Two bathers saw the ship coming down and attempted to seize the handling lines. When the ship hit the ground, a bomb was knocked off thus giving the craft sufficient static lift to send it on its way to Daly City, its next stop. The bathers established the fact that when the L-8 drifted in from the sea, there was nobody on board, the

engines were stopped, and the gondola door was open.

When the airship had investigated the oil slick, there were a Coast Guard boat, a Navy craft, and several fishing boats in the immediate vicinity. They saw the ship come down low, drop two smoke flares, and then ascend and fly off into the overcast. There was no doubt in the minds of the officers on those boats that the airship was under complete control at that time. One boat was so near the L-8 that it made every attempt to get away to a safe distance because it thought the airship was about to drop bombs.

At 1020 a Pan American Airways clipper sighted the airship and a few minutes later (1030) one of the OS2Us sent out by Air Control saw the L-8 break through the overcast at 2000 feet, then descend into it again. The blimp was undoubtedly not under control when sighted by the OS2U because the pressure height of the ship was 1000 feet.

Such are the known facts of the L-8's flight. Here the conjecture begins. It is quite evident that the mishap to Lieutenant Cody and Ensign Adams occurred between the time the airship was seen by the surface craft to rise into the overcast and its landing on the beach. That an enemy submarine could have popped up and surprised the L-8 while it was investigating the oil slick, is most improbable because of the great amount of surface craft activity in the immediate vicinity. Any such occurrence would have certainly been seen. The submarine theory is still further discounted because no enemy submarines have been reported in the area and the confidential folder was secure.

The most logical theory - and it is only a theory - is that the crew's disappearance was entirely accidental and unintentional. Both officers knew that, because of the prevailing winds, they could free balloon back to the mainland if in trouble. If they had experienced difficulty with the airship, it is inconceivable

that they would immediately abandon it especially without radioing their intention to do so. Furthermore, no evidence of trouble, except the dead motors, were found when the ship was salvaged.

The usual explanation is that at some time during the flight, one of the officers may have leaned out of the car, lost his balance, and fallen part way out. The other then rushed to his aid and that during the struggle to get back into the car, both fell from the ship. The open door is regarded as fairly good proof that they left the ship by means of it. The position of the throttles does not tend to verify this theory for the pilot would certainly not leave one engine full on and the other half-way so when he went back to pull his companion into the ship. However, the throttle positions might be justified if the motors were dead which could be a reason for one of the crew to climb out onto the outrigger. It is possible that the motors had been idling and had simply choked out; the throttle positions could have been caused by the Daly City Fire Department as it clambered over the ship.

Many theories have been advanced as to what actually happened on that flight but almost all agree that it was a freak accident of some kind. The mystery is heightened by the fact that although both officers were obviously wearing life belts, their bodies were never found. Could the men have been picked up? If so, by whom?

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The above information had been obtained through informal conversations with the former Commanding Officer of Squadron Thirty-Two.



From Appendix EE - Squadron Accident Record

Ship L-8  
Flight Captain Lt(jg) Cody, 488.3 hrs.  
Date and Time 16 Aug 1942  
Place of Acc. Daly City, California  
Narrative The L-8 took off from Treasure Island on a routine patrol flight. The ship was seen in the vicinity of the Farallon Islands inspection an oil slick in the area. The ship was next seen drifting over the coast near Fort Funston and it came to earth on a nearby golf course where one of the two bombs were knocked off. The ship went into the air again and descended in Daly City, California. The crew of the two were not aboard and have never been found.

Note: The above are the only references pertinent to the "Riddle" made in the Squadron Historical Report. (ZP.32)

AOVW. Jan 1958

*See News Ltr, 1 Oct. 1942, p. 35.*

*Reports that the L-8 airship was repaired and put into service after its return without crew. Has a brief summary of the "crash under mysterious circumstances" (No mention in earlier letters).*

*Men on board L-8 were Ltjg Ernest Dewitt Cody and CSM Charles Ellis Adams.*

*See NANews, August 1958, pp 10-11.*

## THE RIDDLE OF THE L-8

Notes from ZP-32 Historical Reports, World War II.

From the Chronology:

- 5 Mar 1942 L-8 was accepted by the squadron. Was the former Goodyear commercial airship "Rainbow", which had not yet been assembled and was forwarded to Moffett Field from Akron, Ohio.
- 8 Mar 1942 L-8 began operations from ZP-32's first auxiliary base at Treasure Island.
- 11 Apr 1942 L-8 with Lt. jg E.D. Cody pilot and C.B.M. Desmond crew, dropped 300 pounds of freight on the deck of the USS Hornet, which had departed San Francisco about 1100. (Note that Hornet was then enroute Japan for Doolittle's Raid on Tokyo.)\*

From the Narrative:

On 16 August, the L-8 settled to earth at Daly City, California, with no crew aboard. The L-8 had taken off from Treasure Island several hours before and had been assigned a routine patrol. When the ship crashed, its engines were dead, but there was adequate fuel with the valves open, and the radio equipment was operative. The ship had apparently drifted with the wind toward land, had exceeded its pressure height, then settled slowly to earth. No trace of its crew, Lt. jg. Cody and Ensign Adams, has ever been found, and there are no indications as to what may have happened to them.

The L-8 was salvaged after the crash and on 31 August, was completely repaired and test flown. On 5 September, it was transferred to Watsonville and L-ship operations were resumed from that base.

...the services of a Blimp Squadron thirty two airship were requested for the coverage of amphibious landings at Camp Pendleton, California. The L-8 was made available and spent two weeks in October at Santa Ana and Oceanside, Calif. The L-8 suffered considerable damage on one landing during this period, but was repaired at Santa Ana, and the operation with Camp Pendleton was continued. The L-8 returned to Moffett Field on 31 October and on 1 November was transferred to NAS Moffett Field, where it went into service as one of the training ships for the new Moffett Field lighter-than-air training program. The L-8 had made 360 flights with the Squadron for a total of 1607.2 hours.

\* Action Report for Tokyo Raid state that the freight was 2 boxes of Navigator Domes. (Info from Eds. M.W. Cagle).

8 August 1943

*Ref: 10*  
**UNCLASSIFIED**

**FLEET AIRSHIPS, ATLANTIC  
INTELLIGENCE BULLETIN NUMBER 2**

Classification cancelled  
by authority of  
CHIEF OF INFORMATION  
NAVY DEPT., WASH D.C.  
on 12/12/54

THE RIDDLE OF THE L-8

Signature [Signature] Rank [Signature]

**UNCLASSIFIED**

RECEIVED AT 11:00 AM ON AUGUST 16  
OF AVIATION HISTORY

At 0600 on 16 August 1942, the L-8, of Airship Squadron Thirty-Two, took off on a patrol mission. Five hours later, the airship drifted in from the sea and floated to earth empty in the streets of Daly City, California. No trace has ever been found of the crew of the L-8 and their disappearance is today as much of a mystery as it was when it occurred.

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Classification cancelled  
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OFFICE OF INFORMATION  
NAVY DEPT., WASH. D.C.

on 12/12/57  
Signature *[Signature]* Rank *[Signature]*

The Riddle of the L-8 cont'd

UNCLASSIFIED

the envelope to see if anybody was inside. The condition of the car was good. One bomb was missing. The radio was operative. The motors were stopped although one throttle was open and the other, half-way so. The ignition switches were on. The propellers were bent but from all signs had not been bent while rotating. The rubber life jackets were missing (to be expected as the crew wore them over water) but the life raft was in place. The confidential portfolio was in order. The car had not been immersed in the sea. There was no indication of fire. Plenty of fuel was aboard, and the valves were open to the engines. The cabin door was open.

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SECURITY, WASH. D.C.

The Riddle of the L-8 cont'd

ON 12/12/52  
Signature Rank

The most logical theory - and it is only a theory - is that the crew's disappearance was entirely accidental and unintentional. Both officers knew that, because of the prevailing winds, they could free balloon back to the mainland if in trouble. If they had experienced difficulty with the airship, it is inconceivable that they would immediately abandon it, especially without radioing their intention to do so. Furthermore, no evidence of trouble, except the dead motors, were found when the ship was salvaged.

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UNCLASSIFIED

# The mystery flight of the L-8

By JO1 L. Carter Keck  
Reprinted from Moffett News,  
May 8, 1968

It was a quiet Sunday morning as John Scotto left his house and began his walk along a narrow suburban street in Daly City, Calif. Glancing up, he stopped and stared. A partially deflated blimp was drifting towards him, obviously descending.

The blimp settled gently toward the street, scraped across some power lines and fell to the pavement. A crowd quickly gathered and held the blimp down until the police and fire departments could be called.

When the fire department arrived they examined the blimp and found no one aboard. Inside the blimp's car was an officer's hat, a half-eaten sandwich and a still-warm cup of coffee that had spilled across some papers. Everything was as it should be except there was no

crew.

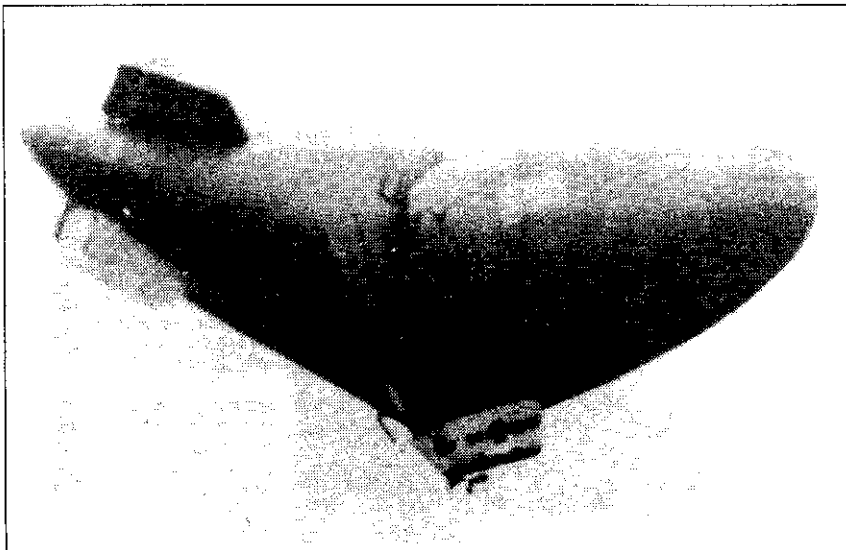
The police called NAS Moffett Field.

## The flight

At 6 a.m. on Sunday, August 16, 1942, a U.S. Navy blimp took off on a routine patrol from Naval Station Treasure Island. The L-8, attached to a Moffett Field airship squadron, was detached to Treasure Island.

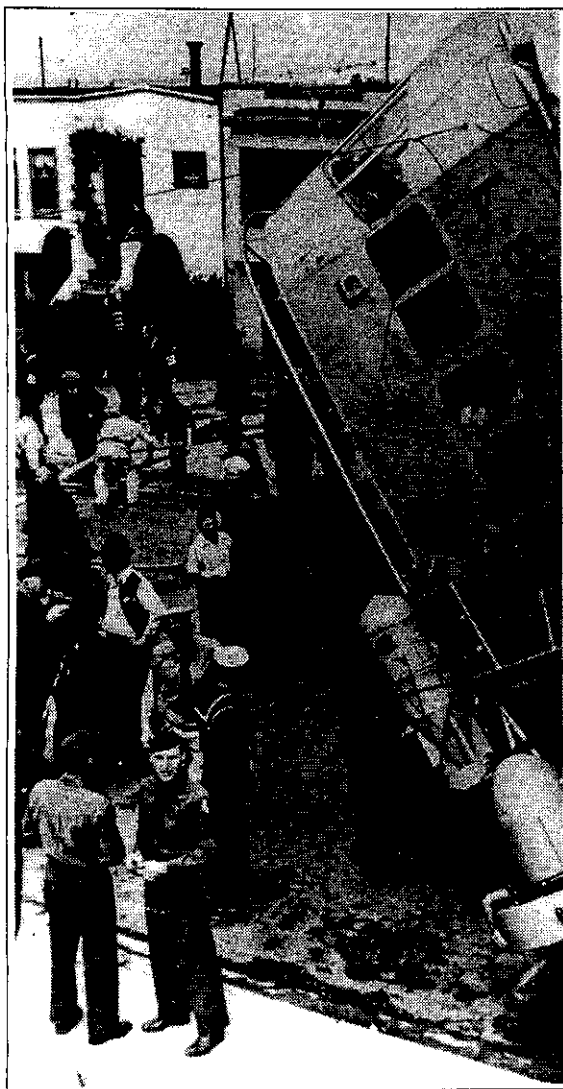
Aboard the blimp were two experienced lighter-than-air crewmen, Lt. j.g. Ernest D. Cody, 27, and Ens. Charles E. Adams, 38. The men routinely established radio contact with Moffett Field and began their normal ASW search procedures off the Golden Gate Bridge.

Almost two hours after take-off, at 7:50 a.m., Cody reported to Moffett that he had sighted an oil slick five miles east of the Farallon Islands and was going to investigate.



Above, the partially deflated condition of the blimp as it drifted over Daly City indicated the L-8 had reached her pressure height, automatically released some of her gas and descended. This caused the airship to buckle in the middle.

Left, at 11:15 a.m. on Sunday, August 16, 1942, Moffett Field received a call from the Daly City police. L-8 was laying in a residential street, and would the Navy kindly do something about it. The captain's hat is visible, resting on the control panel in the front window. One of two 500-pound depth bombs still hangs from the gondola.



Fifteen minutes later, Moffett failed to establish radio contact with the L-8. After repeated attempts to raise the airship on the radio, Moffett called NAS Alameda and reported an emergency.

Alameda sent out two OS2U search planes which headed west toward the Farallons.

Over the ocean, a heavy overcast was soaked in tight. The search planes informed Moffett they intended to fly over the cloud cover. They saw nothing.

At 11:15 a.m., Moffett Field received a call from the Daly City police. The L-8 was laying in a residential street, and would the Navy kindly do something about it.

## Witnesses

Late reports and an investigation pieced together the L-8's flight path after it had reported the oil slick off the Farallons.

Near the area of the oil slick, a Coast Guard cutter and a Naval vessel were conducting separate operations. Neither seemed to notice the blimp in the area.

At least one of the several fishing boats in the area, however, took a great deal of notice. The captain reported seeing the L-8 come down close to the ocean and drop two smoke flares. As the blimp turned toward the boat, the captain decided to stand clear of the area. He thought the blimp was going to drop bombs. The L-8 simply flew off into the overcast.

For two and one-half hours, no one saw or heard from the L-8. Sometime during this period, Cody

and Adams disappeared.

At 10:20 a.m., a Pan American Airways Clipper sighted the blimp flying aimlessly above the clouds.

At 10:30 a.m., one of the search aircraft reported seeing the L-8 break through the overcast at 2,000 feet.

At 10:45 a.m., the blimp was seen from Fort Funston, flying low toward the shore. The blimp drifted toward the beach on a strong sea wind and touched down at the Olympic Club Golf Course. The touchdown impact dislodged one of the depth bombs carried by the airship. Having deposited the bomb, the L-8 became airborne once more before anyone could secure it.

The L-8 was next seen by Scotto at 11 a.m. as it landed in the street.

## The investigation

The investigation into the events surrounding the missing crew of the L-8 was as puzzling as the mishap itself.

The first thing obvious to investigators was that at some time during the two and one-half hours when the crew disappeared, the L-8 had reached her pressure height. The partially deflated condition of the blimp as it drifted over Daly City indicated the L-8 had reached her pressure height, automatically released some of her gas and descended. This caused the airship to buckle in the middle.

The salvage party from Moffett discovered the airship in good condition. The windows of the car were all closed, but the cabin door was open. Bystanders said the door

was open when the blimp landed in the street.

Investigators found the ship's two propellers badly bent. One depth bomb was missing (the one she lost on the golf course), and the radio was in perfect working order.

The parachutes and rubber life raft were intact and in their places. A portfolio of classified documents was in its proper place in the car. Investigators determined the car had not been in the water at any time during the flight. Further investigation revealed plenty of fuel in the tanks.

The throttles were set to indicate the airship had been in the process of turning. The ignition switches were on. The engines were in operating condition although they were not running.

The only things missing were the crew and their "Mac West" life jackets.

No real determination was ever made as to what exactly happened aboard the L-8 on August 16, 1942. Cody and Adams were declared missing. On August 17, they were presumed dead.

The airship was hauled back to Moffett Field, refurbished and returned to service. She became one of the training blimps at Moffett until May 15, 1946 when she was purchased by the Goodyear Airship Company and renamed the "Mayflower."

No one ever heard from Cody or Adams again. Now, two streets at NAS Moffett Field were named in memory of these airship pilots.